



A Nonpartisan Public Policy and Research Office of the Connecticut General Assembly

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Testimony of Julia Evans Starr
Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging

The Judiciary Committee

March 2, 2016

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*With 21 volunteer
board members from
across the state*

Senator Coleman and Representative and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Julia Evans Starr, and I am Executive Director for Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging. I thank you for this opportunity to comment on the bill before you today regarding efforts to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging is the nonpartisan, public policy and research office of the General Assembly. It has been an effective statewide leader in improving the quality of life for older adults and persons with disabilities for 22 years. With just 4 employees and 21 volunteer members from across the state, we shape innovative public policies, promote government accountability, establish diverse partnerships and coalitions, and analyze demographic trends to prepare Connecticut for a growing older adult population.

Comments on Raised Bill No. 5403: An Act Increasing Penalties for Failure to Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalks and Failure to Exercise Due Care to Avoid Hitting a Pedestrian or Cyclist

As you may know, pursuant to Public Act 13-109, the Legislative Commission on Aging spearheads an ongoing, statewide livable communities initiative. Livable communities are places that foster independence across the lifespan to facilitate aging in place and community. Necessarily, aging-supportive communities offer affordable, accessible and diverse transportation options, especially walkability and bikeability. According to the results of our recent statewide survey and policy analysis:¹

- Connecticut residents want to become less car-dependent. Compared to today (82%), fewer Connecticut adults (72%) plan to use their cars as their

¹ Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging. Transportation Policy Brief: How Can We Best Support Residents' Transportation Needs Across the Lifespan in Connecticut? May 2015.
<http://coa.cga.ct.gov/images/pdf/TransportationPolicyBrief--FINAL.pdf>



primary form of transportation in the future. Moreover, 47% of Connecticut adults reported currently living in a suburb where more people drive to most places, but only 8% of Connecticut adults want to live there in the future.

- More Connecticut residents plan to bike in the future, with the highest increases for the 50-65-year-old age group (13 percentage point increase) and 66 years and older age group (9 percentage point increase).
- Creating a more walkable infrastructure is a top priority for Connecticut residents, second only to maintaining existing transportation systems. Among new public investments, the strongest demand by Connecticut residents is for new sidewalks and pedestrians crossing.

To meet the growing demand, communities are increasingly adopting Complete Streets policies, which seek to ensure that streets are designed and operated to safely accommodate all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit-riders of all ages and abilities. And in October, 2014, the Connecticut Department of Transportation issued a policy statement, articulating that, as a condition of funding, Complete Streets must be considered.

But despite these policy transformations, many of Connecticut's roadways still fail to adequately ensure the safety of non-motorized users. Connecticut ranks 27th nationally on the Pedestrian Danger Index, with pedestrians comprising 12.6% of the State's traffic-related fatalities between 2003 and 2012. Older adults are disproportionately impacted by adverse traffic encounters. Between 2003 and 2010, they represented 28.4% of Connecticut's pedestrian fatalities, even though they comprised 13.8% of the state's population during the same time period.²

Within the ten years, the proportion of older adults in Connecticut will grow to exceed 20% in nearly every town in Connecticut, exceeding 40% in some towns. As Connecticut's older adult population continues to grow, and as that population increasingly turns to non-motorized transportation options to successfully age in place, so too does the urgency to consider strategies that increase pedestrian and bicycle safety.

The Commission supports Bill 5403, which increases penalties for failure to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks and failure to exercise due care to avoid hitting a pedestrian or cyclist. However, the literature demonstrates that motorists make only moderate adjustments in their behavior, if at all, when fines are raised, and only if enforcement is robust. Accordingly, we urge you to consider this bill as part of a more comprehensive strategy to promote non-motorized user safety, one that:

- Incentivizes every town in Connecticut to adopt a Complete Streets policy;

² Smart Growth America. Dangerous by Design 2014: Connecticut.
<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/research/dangerous-by-design/dbd2014/state/connecticut/>

- Reinvests fines collected in data analyses and resulting road design and infrastructure improvements to promote traffic-calming and speed reductions;
- Extends and improves the off-road bicycle and pedestrian network, including enhanced sidewalk construction; and
- Continues to improve motorist awareness of and respect for non-motorized users for ongoing education.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this bill today.